Chapter 10

Up a Creek without a Paddle:
Teachers’ Experiences of the One-to-One Laptop Initiative

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ABSTRACT

“Up a creek without a paddle” explains teachers' views of the new one-to-one laptop initiative implemented by the Ministries of Education in Trinidad and Tobago and Saint Lucia. These new initiatives required teachers to change their pedagogy and to negotiate the digital divide that existed between themselves and their students. This study uses the phenomenological research methodology to examine the experiences of teachers in Trinidad and Tobago and in Saint Lucia in implementing one-to-one laptop initiatives. Six secondary school teachers, three from Trinidad and Tobago and three from Saint Lucia, were interviewed to explore the barriers or fences they had to negotiate in the implementation of the one-to-one laptop initiatives. Findings reveal that while some teachers have the competence to integrate ICT in the classroom, others, mainly digital immigrants, lack basic technological skills and/or the required pedagogical skills to engage their students, the digital natives. Discussion and recommendations focus on assisting teachers to obtain the paddle to navigate the creek by building on existing theoretical frameworks that support the use of technology to enhance learning and prepare students for the global economy.

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INTRODUCTION

Ubiquitous computing has influenced the teaching and learning landscape (Brown & Petitto, 2003). Brown and Petitto (2003) described ubiquitous computing in educational institutions as one where all students have laptops and there is reliable Internet connectivity. Much attention has been paid to the provision of laptops to secondary school students in many developing countries with an ensuing discourse on the importance of one-to-one laptop initiatives. More and more education policy makers are including one-to-one computer technology in education to facilitate student learning and achievement (Holcomb, 2009). The one-to-one computer initiative proposed by governments is often seen as a means to keep abreast with the global trend of ICT integration in education. There are concerns about the hasty provisions of laptops to students without the necessary infrastructure or teacher training to enhance the teaching-learning environment (Hanney, Harrison & Wamakote, 2010; Obakhume, 2010). One question that remains on the lips of many is whether the laptops provided to students will have a positive impact on students’ learning (Barak, Lipson & Lerman, 2006).

The Promise and its Fulfilment

The one-to-one laptop initiative was part of the government of Trinidad and Tobago’s manifesto promise to the electorate. In September 2010, the government provided laptops to all 17,300 Form One students and 3,000 teachers. To date, the government has distributed 73,200 laptops to students at the cost of $253 million (Alexander, 2014).

The primary objective of the initiative was to “leverage the potential of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to significantly enhance the Trinidad and Tobago education system through the provision of laptop computers to secondary school students” (MOE, 2010, p. 1). Teachers were expected to use the computers in their classrooms to enhance learning through computer-assisted instruction, resource-based learning and collaborative learning, among other strategies (MOE, 2010, p. 7). The Ministry of Education (MOE) acknowledged the need for training and professional development of teachers for the success of the initiative. They pledged to provide training and professional development “not only on technical skills but also on curriculum integration” (MOE, 2010, p. 7).

The Government of Saint Lucia introduced the Laptop initiative to secondary school students in 2013. The Saint Lucian government signed a memorandum of understanding with the government of Trinidad and Tobago to procure laptops to the students of Saint Lucia. Although the government of Trinidad and Tobago provided laptops to Form one students, the government of Saint Lucia made the decision to
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